STATEMENT BY KEVIN CALE

The heritage of the Great Yorkshire Plain is rich and diverse and provides us with evidence of man’s uninterrupted impact on the landscape stretching back to the retreat of the last ice age estimated at about 12,000 years ago. As part of this environment, our site shares these attributes. So why is it that this landscape has not received its deserved archaeological prominence and why has its story not been told?

Until comparatively recently members of the archaeological community have been drawn to the more obvious monuments in this landscape. This has focused research on local sites such as the extensive complex of henge monuments, the Devils Arrows and Dere Street - the local Roman Road and precursor to the A1M. Whilst fascinating monuments in their own right, these studies have, unfortunately, helped reinforce the impression that archaeological evidence is all about studying selective sites, “dots on a map” as they sometimes referred to, at the expense of the “gaps” in between. As such, interest in the heritage of the Great Yorkshire Plain has, until very recently, been exclusively the reserve of the Late Prehistorian and the Romanist. It is my belief and one that is now shared by many others in the archaeological community, including members of English Heritage, that the landscape should be viewed and studied as a rich tapestry of interweaving threads of evidence from all periods of history when such evidence presents itself. It is only by drawing out the diverse elements of the past that we can best comprehend and appreciate our historical inheritance.

Through my career I have been involved in studying the archaeology of the Great Yorkshire Plain for the last 23 years. This has involved conventional archaeological techniques such as excavation, fieldwalking and survey and more recently I have been responsible for initiating and developing Community Archaeology in region.

During the early 1990’s I led the small team that reconnoitred that swathe of land that ran parallel and adjacent to the A1 prior to the upgrading of the carriageway to motorway status. This rapid field survey (which included fields 88 and 89, both of which are on the Northbound site of this proposed MSA site) established that this corridor had witnessed intensive prehistoric activity during the Neolithic and Bronze Age. The scatter of worked flint fragments that are touchstones with our ancestors were recorded within this proposed MSA site in abundance, - a noticeable hot spot of activity was observed. This flint concentration prompted archaeologists to return to fields 88 and 89 to monitor and record the top soil removal from land adjacent to the A1. The results of their work was breathtaking and nearly 20 years on are still being analysed and dropped into a wider regional body of evidence. The archaeologist recorded a group of shallow pits, many of which contained charred foodstuffs, burnt flint tools and pottery fragments - all of which had survived for over five thousand years buried beneath this proposed MSA site. The verdict is still out as to what they tell us about our ancestors who formed them other than it would seem likely that they are connected to the movement of people across the Great Yorkshire Plain possibly en-route to the henge monuments to the north.

It is poignant that it takes the very real threat of further development to allow the facts to be drawn together from the filing systems of county hall and for it to be shared with the local community.

Community Archaeology projects have been realised across Yorkshire in part to facilitate this information flow. Across the Great Yorkshire Plain I have been working with the Ripon Community
Archaeology Project in discovering and unravelling the archaeological story for this area. The picture that emerges about our heritage is sometimes fragmentary but none the less fascinating. It's a story based on decades of archaeological scrutiny, forensic like studies of historic maps and aerial photographs, collaborations with metal detectorists and the recollections of local landowners. Whilst Kirby Hill has not yet been investigated neighbouring Marton le Moor has. Results from this work indicate that an intense and complex Iron Age / Romano British field system straddles the civil parish boundary extending towards this proposed MSA site. It has become apparent that the value of this agricultural land has long since been recognised and what is now awaited is the discovery of the settlement that farmed this land.

The effect of delving into the past in this manner by its local community can often challenge our perception as to which aspects of heritage matter. It's not untypical for the story around a second world war aircraft crash to eclipse the interest in a prehistoric burial mound and yet for many years, for various reasons, we the archaeologists have failed to tell the whole story.

A very natural consequence of this new approach has been to introduce this to schools. Recently I have been invited by Boroughbridge Primary School to work with the children to broaden and captivate an interest in the children’s local heritage. So successful has this been, an Archaeology After School Club has been formed allowing the children to further knowledge and research. The cumulative effects of these heritage studies for the future of our buried past should not be underestimated. The dissemination of knowledge and the collective ownership of the rich heritage of this landscape will help to ensure its survival for generations to come.

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am very pleased to report that funding has just been granted by the Heritage Lottery Fund to allow this club to continue and flourish for the next three years. Support for this pioneering initiative has come from many directions including local community organisations, interest groups, English Heritage, Cambridge University, The Ministry of Defence and local landowners.

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